

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

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Bill 44, Public Education and the Soul of Democracy

Dennis Theobald

Over the past three weeks, hundreds of Albertans have been engaged in a very public conversation about the values and purposes of public education in Alberta, albeit not the one envisioned by the Minister of Education when he launched *Inspiring Education, a Dialogue with Albertans*.

The conversation is occurring in the pages of newspapers, on internet blogs, on Facebook and Twitter, on the floor of the legislature and in schools and homes across the province. It began in response to Bill 44 and the Alberta government's proposed amendments to the human rights act requiring teachers to provide prior notification to parents before engaging in instruction or educational exercises or using instructional materials that explicitly deal with religion, sexuality or sexual orientation.

While the various arguments being raised by teachers, students, parents, trustees and others about Bill 44 are interesting in their own right, what fascinates me is that these arguments go to the soul of our democracy. They tell us about Albertans' values and their understanding of the place that public education should occupy in a democratic society.

The critics of Bill 44 and, ironically, those supporters of the bill such as Minister of Education Dave Hancock who argue that it will have no substantial effect, see public education as playing an essential role in preparing students to function in democracy. In their view, our schools have a responsibility to teach students how to think critically and function effectively in a diverse society where they will be exposed to beliefs that are very different from their own.

The more unapologetic supporters of Bill 44 emphasize the unencumbered right and duty of individual parents to choose whether, where and when their children will be exposed to particular ideas and information. From their perspective, classroom conversations that challenge their closely held beliefs are in themselves a form of indoctrination from which their children should be protected.

As parents we can understand the visceral desire to protect one's children from perceived harm. But for teachers, the prior notification requirements of Bill 44 will have an impact on the quality of classroom discourse and the potential for real learning, and undermine the importance of building an inclusive and tolerant society.

The public education system serves and is accountable to the entire community in all its richness and diversity. It is an education system that respects the role of parents to direct their child's education, but also respects the right of the child to learn and develop as an individual. It is an education system that approaches the subject matter of education with discernment, integrity and rigor. It is an education system in which conscientious teachers exercise professional judgment to facilitate real learning in safe and caring classrooms.

Please note that this article was written after Bill 44 passed second reading in the Legislature and was on its way to Committee of the Whole. And although the government has suggested some amendments to the original bill, they are not enough to allay the Association's concerns. For more information on Bill 44, contact Dennis Theobald at dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca; phone 780-447-9416.

**At times our
own light
goes out and
is rekindled
by a spark
from another
person.
Each of us
has cause
to think
with deep
gratitude of
those who
have lighted
the flame
within us.**

**—Albert
Schweitzer**



Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation

Teacher Growth Supervision and Evaluation Policy 2.1.5 reflected a major change in the philosophy of supervision and evaluation. It now reflects a professional model based on teacher growth rather than teacher deficiency. The policy promotes the professionalization of teaching; that is, all teachers are responsible for student learning and work within a model of collegial, collaborative work to share teaching practices in professional learning communities.

You are invited to attend **Teacher Growth, Supervision, Evaluation and Practice Review workshop**

September 28–29 at Barnett House in Edmonton

If you are interested in attending, please e-mail Marilyn Terlaan in Member Services at marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca

Educational Leadership Academy, July 12–16, 2009, in Banff, Alberta

Featuring Dr Todd Whitaker

How to Deal with Difficult People

This workshop will help administrators develop a repertoire of tools and skills for comfortable and effective interaction with parents and teachers. It will cover how to deal with people who are bossy, volatile, argumentative, aggressive or, maybe the worst, apathetic. The workshop will provide specific phrases for administrators to use to get results and also will identify trigger words that unintentionally make matters worse.

For additional information, contact the conference director, Konni deGoeij, or Leslie Kaun at 780-447-9410 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (elsewhere in Alberta); fax 780-455-6481; e-mail ELA@ata.ab.ca.

Healthy Interactions

Healthy Interactions is a communications and conflict-resolution program offered by the Association in collaboration with teachers or school jurisdictions. The newly redesigned program is now being made available to teachers wishing to receive a certificate as a trained facilitator in the Healthy Interactions program. Registration for this workshop is free to active members and includes all training materials, breakfast and lunch.

The following facilitator workshops are open to active members of the ATA:

August 17–19, 2009

Location: Barnett House, Edmonton
Registration deadline: June 19, 2009

October 26–28, 2009

Location: Barnett House, Edmonton
Registration deadline: October 9, 2009

For additional information, contact Joyce Sherwin, Brian Andrais or Marilyn Terlaan at 780-447-9454 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (elsewhere in Alberta); fax 780-455-6481; e-mail marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca.

Alberta Education News

New Business Plan Goal

Alberta Education has added a fourth goal to its business plan—“Success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students”—and introduced revisions to the accountability pillar.

The new goal will be measured by parallel performance measures using the provincial achievement tests (PAT) and diploma examination results (four years of results) as well as the measures from the student information system drop-out rate (three years of results), high school completion rate (three years of results), Rutherford Scholarship eligibility rate (one year of results), and participation rate in four or more diploma examinations (three years of results). However, because Aboriginal self-identification is fairly new, not all the measures have enough data to report fully. All the measures will, though, have achievement evaluations excluding the postsecondary transition rate, which will be available in 2010. The improvement evaluations will be available in 2009 for the PAT and diploma results; the remainder will be available in 2010. The exception again is the postsecondary transition rate, which will have enough data to be evaluated for improvement in May 2011.

High School Flexibility Study

The executive team of Alberta Education has approved the following 16 schools to participate in the High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Study initiative:

1. Archbishop O’Leary Catholic High School, Edmonton Catholic School District No 7
2. Bellerose Composite High School, St Albert Protestant Separate School District No 6
3. Bishop McNally High School, Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School District No 1
4. Catholic Central High School, Holy Spirit Roman Catholic Separate Regional Division No 4
5. Edwin Parr Composite Community School, Aspen View Regional Division No 19
6. Grande Prairie Composite High School, Grande Prairie Public School District No 2357
7. Holy Trinity Academy, Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division No 3
8. J C Charyk Hanna School, Prairie Land Regional Division No 25
9. James Fowler High School, Calgary School District No 19
10. M E LaZerte School, Edmonton School District No 7
11. Olds High School, Chinook’s Edge School Division No 73
12. Peace Wapiti Academy, Peace Wapiti School Division No 76

13. Sainte Marguerite Bourgeoys, Greater Southern Separate Catholic Francophone Education Region No 4
14. St Mary of the Lake Catholic School, Living Waters Catholic Regional Division No 42
15. Spruce Grove Composite High School, Parkland School Division No 70
16. William E Hay Composite High School, Clearview School Division No 71

As reported earlier the ministry is leading a three-year pilot project to determine if the requirement that students have access to 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per course credit should be maintained. The pilot project will explore the relationship between hours of face-to-face instruction and student success.

New Accountability Book

Copies of *Educational Accountability: Professional Views from the Field* are now available at the Association. The book describes the views and experiences of nine Alberta scholar-practitioners with Alberta accountability policies and how they affect students, educators, learning and teaching in a variety of settings, from K–12 schools to postsecondary institutions and government agencies. “A must-read book,” says Michael Podlosky of the Alberta Teachers’ Association.



Q & A

GORDON THOMAS,
Executive Secretary

Searching Student Lockers

Q: I am the principal of a school. Do I have the right to search student lockers?

A: A student attending school has a reasonable expectation of privacy as per section 8 of the *Charter*. However, the principal and teachers are charged under the *School Act* with providing a safe environment for students and staff and for maintaining the order and discipline in the school. Although the reasonable expectation of privacy would exclude random searches, Justice Cory, in the 1998 Supreme Court case of *R v. M.R.M.*, reasoned that “they [students] must know that this may sometimes require searches of students and their personal effects and the seizure of prohibited items. It would not be reasonable for a student to expect to be free from such searches. A student’s reasonable expectation of privacy in the school environment is therefore significant diminished.” A search by school officials of a student under their authority may be undertaken if there are reasonable grounds to believe that a school rule has been or is being violated, and that evidence of the violation will be found in the location or on the person of the student searched. Further, school lockers are the property of the school board and are used by the students only with the permission of the school. School authorities should inform their students of the school’s right to search lockers and to remove locks. School authorities should have appropriate policies in place to communicate that there is a reduced expectation of privacy for students.

The Rocky Road Ahead Balancing Competing Interests

April 25–27, 2010
Hyatt Regency, Calgary

The 21st annual conference of the Canadian Association for the Practical Study of Law in Education

For further information phone: 905-702-1710, email: info@capsle.ca or visit our website at www.capsle.ca



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